

Australia's first university sporting museum: a case study

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Abstract

Expansion of sporting facilities provided an opportunity to develop a new museum, the Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame Museum. This came from a decision to build linkages with sporting alumni to develop a distinct sense of institutional identity and instil a sense of pride and endowment in the Macquarie University community. Museum studies student interns were responsible for reconnecting with alumni of various sporting clubs to seek out stories and objects.

While sporting museums are known in the higher education sector in other parts of the world, most Australian university museums have grown from discipline-specific teaching collections.

Introduction: The university context

Many authors (e.g. CHATTERJEE 2010, SIMPSON 2012a) have noted that university museums typically have their antecedents in teaching collections developed to underpin instructional pedagogies in discipline specific teaching programs.¹

Macquarie University, in Sydney, Australia, is a medium sized tertiary education institution with just under a total of 40,000 internal and external students. It was the third university to be established in the greater Sydney region and is approaching its 50th anniversary in 2014.

Macquarie University has a number of museums that are derived from traditional origins in areas such as ancient history (Museum of Ancient Cultures), modern history (Australian History Museum) and biology (Biological Sciences Museum). A number of factors combined in 2006 to allow the development of a new museum, the Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame Museum, with an entirely different philosophy and purpose completely unconstrained by any specific academic discipline.

In terms of historic data, a work on the early history of the university's Sports Association (PHILLIPS 1995) provided a useful baseline. In more recent times, however, the activities of the Sports Association's groups were not documented. More importantly, there was no sense of any integration into a broader institutional narrative, the individual histories of the groups were disparate and unrelated to each other or the parent organisation, Macquarie University. The tangible heritage of these groups was dispersed among individuals who previously or, in some cases, were still active within the sporting clubs. The intangible heritage of these groups consisted of memories, stories and recollections of participating individuals. It was likely that without an effort to capture and integrate this, much would have been permanently lost.

In 2006, under new management, there was a significant expansion of sporting facilities at Macquarie University including the development of a new aquatic centre. A small area connecting the existing facilities with the new development was identified as a suitable space to showcase this sporting narrative. Management of the Sports Association linked up with the university's museum studies program. Postgraduate students can undertake substantial project work as part of their academic program. This provided a significant opportunity for one of us² to be directly involved in the planning and development of a new campus museum, the only new museum developed on campus in the last 20 years. From the beginning there was recognition that the new museum should not be a static

¹ BOYLAN (1999) tracks the origins of the relationship between objects and academics back to antiquity on the presumption that much of the teachings of early observational inquiry would have been based on collections of specimens.

² Laura Giberson.

representation of past events and achievements. Instead it was envisaged that the museum should be primarily focused on people's stories rather than objects. As such, it would play a fundamental role in promoting the Sports Association's aspirations of a healthy lifestyle for students, staff and the local community. It would also support the broader institutional aspirations of stakeholder engagement and community building through sport. This philosophy sets it apart from the vast majority of campus museums. A recent survey of Australian university museums and collections (SIMPSON 2012b) concluded that this is the first university-based museum of sport in Australia.

The university originally commenced with only nine sporting clubs and an annual budget of \$12,000, a one room gym and two squash courts. The expansion of facilities in the sports complex included the development of a 50 metre outdoor pool and a 25 m indoor pool.³ There have now been over 30 sporting clubs or groups associated with the university at various times. These include clubs for Australian football, badminton, basketball, cricket, fencing, golf, gymnastics, hockey, karate, mountaineering, rowing, rugby league, rugby union, skiing, squash, soccer, tennis, cheerleading, ultimate Frisbee and the Macquanauts (a scuba diving club). While this diversity can potentially provide interesting material collections, of more significance is the diversity of shared experiences and stories. Capturing as much of this as possible will be important for the future of the museum. Developing the museum was clearly framed with the recognition that while the concept of a healthy, active and engaged lifestyle is important for all staff and students, it also produces some elite athletes. Their achievements can be seen as important points of connection for the entire university community. The museum also positioned Macquarie University as one that produces elite athletes, with state-of-the-art sporting facilities. The museum was well positioned to build awareness with the community, potential students and with athletes that Macquarie University competes at the top level in university sport.

Sport in the museum

The subject matter of museums has traditionally focused on art, history or science. A sporting museum is a fairly contemporary notion. There is no Australian university museum model to guide development. As noted above, the initial concept for a hall of fame at Macquarie University came about because the University Sports Association felt that the history of athletics and extent of elite sport at the university was not well showcased to the university community. At the same time there was a clear realisation that, in a university context sport is a significant part of the lives of many staff and students, giving the concept of a hall of fame relevance to the community at Macquarie University. It was also recognized that sport can be a catalyst to engage and build relationships with alumni to encourage long-term donor relationships.

Goulding (2000) suggested that in showcasing traditional subjects such as history and art many museums in fact make visitors feel excluded from the exhibition subject matter. Exhibits can act as barriers to visitors through exhibiting material that has no specific relevance to many individuals. In history museums in particular, it is nearly impossible to infuse relevance by exhibiting every visitor's unique historical heritage. Sport, however, is important in many peoples' lives and is appropriate subject matter for a museum to bring people together through a shared experience. It is fitting, therefore, that museums are developed to celebrate sport. Gammon & Ramshaw (2005) argued that sport includes such unique cultural mores, values and traditions that make it appropriate subject matter for the museum environment and compared such rich potential as similar to a history museum capturing the idiosyncrasies of influential historical leaders. Even though the university's Sports Association has a significant history there was nowhere to centrally aggregate these components. The

³ Information from Sporting Hall of Fame website at: mq.edu.au/on_campus/sport_and_recreation/hall_of_fame (accessed December 10, 2012).

Hall of Fame at Macquarie is a focus that allows the preservation and celebration of the institution's unique cultural sporting heritage that has been well established for many years. The design of the new Sport and Aquatic Centre left a large empty space in the corridor between the old section of the sports facility and the new addition, leaving an appropriate space for a museum. This space works well as a museum not only logistically, but also symbolically, since the museum acts a bridge from the old section of Macquarie athletics to the contemporary new addition.

Sporting halls of fame are different from the 'traditional' museum model in terms of potential audience. They appeal to the sports fan and sporting tourist. The difference between a sports visitor and a regular visitor is the former will expect a sporting hall of fame to reflect sport itself; the museum needs to be fun, interactive, innovative, entertaining and physical. While some institutions such as science centres may also aspire to recreate some of these elements as part of the visitor experience, many museums do not. These expectations deviate from many regular museum visitors. In Kurtzman & Zauhar's (1999) *The Virtual Sports Tourist*, six criteria were listed that characterize experiences in sporting halls of fame that visitors considered optimal.

The experience must "require the learning of skills, have concrete goals, provide feedback, let the person feel in control, facilitate concentration and involvement, and be distinct from the everyday world" (KURTZMAN & ZAUHUR 1999, 34). With these six criteria in mind, the development of the Hall of Fame at Macquarie University was intended to produce a museum that is colourful, contemporary, an interactive and evolving space that reflects the physical nature of the sports centre itself. It was assumed that the demographic audience for this museum would, at least initially, be people who are actively participating in fitness and sport, as the audience for this hall of fame will likely be drawn from current members of the Sports Association.

Outside of the institutional setting of higher education, sporting halls of fame differ from many typical museums as they are often private museums owned by sport-affiliated businesses or organisations.⁴ The Hall of Fame at Macquarie is owned by the Sports Association. While the Association is an independent entity in itself it still falls within the category of a university museum through close affiliation with Macquarie University.

Some sporting museums have a chequered history due to governance and management issues. For example, one such museum, the Australian Football League Hall of Fame, was launched in Melbourne during 2004 (FROST 2005). This private museum was subsequently sold within the year having incurred a debt of two million dollars. A few major strategic errors of judgement included: a marketing campaign targeted only to children, high admission prices and a late launch that was not well-timed with the football season. The Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame is marketed to students, staff and families associated with the university community and is free with gym membership. Membership is also available to the local community. No visitation charges are levied from non-members. By developing links with audiences and inviting participation through its relationship with the university parent body, it is intended that the museum will be operationally sustainable and avoid many of the pitfalls associated with sporting museums such as the Australian Football Hall of Fame.

Developing the museum's business

The Sports Association had formed a committee as a working group to steer the development of the museum. At the outset, different business models, based on other museums were considered. The committee decided that the museum would be maintained and managed by the Sports Association's

⁴ Some examples in Australia would also include sport specific museums such as the Australian Tennis Museum, operated by the peak sporting body Tennis Australia, and the Australasian Golfing Museum, part of one of Australia's oldest golf courses in Bothwell, Tasmania.

staff, and museum studies interns. The museum was not intended to directly earn revenue; however, it does serve to promote sport at Macquarie University and act as a catalyst to engage with alumni, students and the community. An opportunity that was pursued early on in the development of the museum was building relationships with sporting alumni and potential long-term donors, who would be more liable to support sporting initiatives and programs at the university. When the museum was first developed, the alumni community had not been strongly engaged or prospected for investing in university sports.

The committee was driven by the association's chief executive officer at the time⁵ who had a clear vision for the sporting hall of fame. This was an important element in planning and conceptualisation of the project. It not only demonstrated institutional commitment to the project, but also provided guidance and quick access to decisions on project components. The committee, however, lacked anyone with a specific museum-related background or museum training, thus enabling an opportunity for postgraduate student⁶ participation in the project during the planning phase. One of the first tasks of the postgraduate student was the development of a series of policy documents, informed by the mission and purpose of the museum for presentation to the committee. Another postgraduate student⁷ worked on a later (2012–2015) phase of strategic planning.

Despite the obvious philosophical orientation to focus on people and stories, the development of any new museum requires material collections to develop interconnections between people and narratives. Originally there was little in the way of material items available to the Sports Association. Material that was available often lacked provenance. The development and approval of a collections policy provided guidelines for a systematic approach to the development of a material collection.

The Hall of Fame Museum was always intended to foster active interest in athletics and the athletic history of competition at Macquarie University. The museum wanted to highlight past successes in athletics to engender a sense of pride and endowment in students as well as generally foster public interest in the sports and recreation facility as well as athletics at Macquarie University. As in all museums, the collection management plan and policy was closely aligned with the mission statement of the museum and guides the curator in collection development. Clear guidelines also enable ongoing collection development by Sports Association staff without specific museum training. Part of the strategy involved actively prospecting for artefact acquisitions from specific athletes and alumni. A targeted calling campaign was conducted through the university's alumni office to inform potential donors about the museum and seek objects.

The committee agreed that the Sporting Hall of Fame would concentrate on collecting the following objects: trophies, sporting equipment, plaques, photographs, sporting uniforms, videos of Macquarie athletics and books that have relevance to Macquarie athletic history such as the annual reports of individual sporting clubs. This meant that the museum's primary subject areas are: Macquarie athletes, Macquarie competitions and Macquarie alumni who have achieved to elite athletic levels. Rather than just being a documentation of achievements, of equal importance are social issues such as women and sport, sport and the media, disability and sport, sport and age, sport and body image, sport and technology and sport at universities in general. It is believed that these subject areas related to Macquarie University through individual examples augmented by oral history research will be the focus of future temporary exhibitions.

⁵ Deidre Anderson.

⁶ Laura Giberson.

⁷ Ashleigh Thomson.

The establishment of policies and processes enabled the expansion of collections. An important part of the development of the collection involved the curator⁸ working with a range of sporting clubs to encourage individuals to donate memorabilia, ephemera and other material of relevance in the private hands of previous sporting alumni. The proactive collecting and relationship building that took place early played a key role in engaging clubs, athletes and alumni with the Sports Association and informing them about the museum. The act of active collecting helped to build early audiences and supporters for the Sporting Hall of Fame. This was only possible through the introduction of a coherent set of professional acquisition processes that involved an assessment of the relevance, use and condition of potential collection objects. A full set of operating policies including processes for bequests, deed of gift, accession, deaccession, storage, conservation and loans were also developed.

Once the policy framework was agreed and in place, the next step involved the development of exhibition content. Ensuring positive visitor experiences is central to the success of the venue. The primary aim of the Sporting Hall of Fame is to encourage a sense of stewardship, pride and a history of achievement in the community at Macquarie University. The committee intended that all exhibitions would inspire visitors to reflect and feel part of the achievements of past athletes at Macquarie. In order to accomplish this, visitors of all cultural backgrounds need to have a positive experience when they engage with the exhibition space.

Linn (1983) suggested exhibits need not provide as much information as possible on a subject. Rather, information should encourage visitors to contemplate the subject further, stimulate debate and discussion and lead the visitor to research the subject further independently. As it stands, there has been little research conducted in the field of Macquarie athletics. Therefore, any information, no matter how concise will likely be fresh to visitors to the museum. Complementing Linn's philosophy, the hall of fame was designed to complement the sports and aquatic centre at Macquarie, making the centre a more comprehensive community centre. The hall of fame is not intended to extensively educate visitors on the history of Macquarie athletics and individual athletes, instead it is intended to serve as a positive space that celebrates past achievements and builds awareness of sport at Macquarie University.

Design and development was driven by the planning committee. This included staff with specific expertise in facilities management, finance and photography. This unique mixture of skills in a university setting with executive leadership produced a dynamic and effective working environment. Elements such as text panels, conservation and preservation standards and display options were not familiar to the committee, and not central elements in the creation of the exhibition space, however, the committee emphasised a few agreed approaches to exhibition design from the outset. Firstly, the need for large, colourful images to be featured in the development of exhibition spaces was seen as an essential element. Textual information needed to be concise and to the point to cognitively orientate the visitor in a simple and direct manner. Basic information such as who is represented in photographs and why that person is significant are a minimum standard throughout. Another important guiding principle for text panels is the ability to easily replace panels when exhibitions are changed. Having permanent text panels in a small exhibition space creates design problems and inflexibility in the future. While visitors need to be cognitively oriented, through a comprehensive organisation of themes and subject areas that are easy to follow, they must also be physically oriented (GOULDING 2000). Directional signage is deployed at key points within the sporting complex.

In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the hall of fame it must be remembered that the mission of the museum is not to directly educate people, but to showcase the achievements of Macquarie University's past athletes. With a range of policies, procedures in place the committee were able to

⁸ Laura Giberson, and later Ashleigh Thomson.

develop the business of the museum enabling collection documentation and expansion, and exhibition development. The project officer⁹ developed three exhibition concepts for consideration as the inaugural exhibition theme for the museum. A further ten forward exhibition concepts were also briefly outlined for the committee to enable it to scope future developments.

The Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame was opened by vice-chancellor, Professor Steven Schwartz on 26 March, 2009. The first exhibition entitled *Our Sporting Community* was focused on a



Fig. 1 - The opening of the Sporting Hall of Fame Museum, from left to right: Deidre Anderson, CEO Campus Experience, Macquarie University; Professor Steven Schwartz, former vice-chancellor Macquarie University; Grant Brits, Macquarie University alumnus and Australian Olympian standing adjacent to his image in the exhibition space. Photo: Effy Alexakis © Campus Experience



Fig. 2 - Museum space showing objects in show cases on right, story boards and text panels on left and video projection on roof. Photo: Effy Alexakis © Campus Experience

selection of high profile sporting participants. This helped to extend connections with previous sporting alumni encouraging donation of more objects to build the museum's collection. The athletes in the first exhibition had achieved success in swimming, rowing, athletics, softball, ultimate frisbee and wheelchair basketball. A rowing coach was also featured. The launch was attended by friends and family of those featured in the exhibition. One of the technical highlights of the museum was the development of a ceiling projector showing video footage which gives visitors a feeling of immersion in the subject. The focus on individual stories reinforces the importance of people in the work of the museum.

The first exhibition was followed by *Origins of Our Sporting Heritage* an exhibition providing insight into the foundations and history of the sporting clubs from the period 1967–1977. It chronicled great events during the university's past and focused on eighteen clubs established during this time. There was also a focus on individual competitions and victories. Personal accounts from individuals and teams were also included similar to the methodological approach adopted in the first exhibition. The third exhibition entitled *Our Sporting Evolution* was launched in late 2011 focusing on the evolution and growth of the Macquarie University sport clubs from 1978–1988.

⁹ Laura Giberson.

In late 2012 *Macquarie at the Olympics* was opened. This exhibition celebrated the achievements of Macquarie University athletes who have competed at the Olympic Games. The museum identified strong university links to the Olympic and Paralympic Games dating back to Montreal in 1976. Seventeen Olympians, including staff, alumni and students have competed. The exhibition was created to celebrate an Olympic year. It also recognised that Macquarie Olympians have embraced the broad Olympic spirit of goodwill, unity, reconciliation and peace in their pursuit of sporting excellence that has captured the public's imagination. The exhibition featured a display cabinet with each athlete's special Olympic memorabilia.¹⁰ This topic was one of the forward exhibition concepts presented to the committee in 2008, during the Beijing Olympics, before the launch of the museum.



Fig. 3 - Ian Thorpe, Macquarie University alumnus and Australian Olympian. Image from the Sporting Hall of Fame Museum. Photo: Fairfax Publications © Campus Experience



Fig. 4 - Tina McKenzie, Macquarie University alumnus and Australian Paralympian. Image from the Sporting Hall of Fame Museum. Photo: Peter Brewty © Campus Experience

A series of other exhibition concepts were also presented to the committee prior to the launch of the museum. They include diverse subject matter such as individual achievements, individual club history, sport and health, sport and nutrition, cross cultural perspectives on sport and gender issues in sport and sports promotion. There is extensive scope for future exhibition work.

Concluding remarks

The development of the new sports and aquatic centre not only included state of the art facilities but was designed to incorporate a sense of community. The facility has attempted to promote healthy living, fitness, nutrition and community. The Hall of Fame Museum celebrates the history and athletic achievements of Macquarie University as a positive facilitator of the Sports Association's mission in support of the broad Macquarie University community.

The work of the Sporting Hall of Fame Museum at Macquarie University has been informed by a philosophy of purposeful community development to build institutional identity. While much has written about the purposeful work of mainstream museums (e.g. SANDELL 1998), a similar philosophical orientation is rarely applied to the development of university museums, with some rare exceptions in more generalised terms (e.g. BURMAN 2006), because of their traditional origin and purpose of supporting the delivery of discipline-specific academic instruction.

For this reason we propose that the Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame Museum represents a distinct type of

¹⁰ Information from Sporting Hall of Fame website: mq.edu.au/on-campus/sport-and-recreation/hall-of-fame/exhibitions (accessed December 10, 2012).

university museum, perhaps best characterised as a 'Museum of Institutional Identity'. A review of the literature on university museums reveals that while identity and institutional purposes have previously been invoked as one of the contributing value adding roles undertaken by university museums, these are usually construed as secondary outcomes rather than as cornerstones of their original foundation.

It is common to ascribe purpose in terms of the preservation of institutional heritage and history, particularly in European universities.¹¹ For example, Heinaemies (2008) describes this function as a responsibility with the emphasis on preserving what exists rather than extending what is possible. This form of institutional prerogative is more a memorialisation than a constructivist paradigm. Some new university museum developments focus on preservation as the establishment paradigm (e.g. MENEZES DE CARVALHO 2012). Other discussions of purpose in the literature tend to focus on the tensions between serving different audiences (e.g. BIANCO 2009) rather than a focus on building new audiences. Purpose is more readily reflected in the work of university museums through more specific narratives such as communicating scientific values and heritage (SOUBIRAN 2006).

A key aspect of the development of Macquarie University's Sporting Hall of Fame was that members of the committee had travelled the world to observe international universities and learn how they worked to advance sport, especially elite sport. This experience, paired with the personal experiences of committee members, working overseas in sporting facilities and for elite sports programs, helped envision and develop the Sporting Hall of Fame. The diverse mix of cultural backgrounds and experiences of participating individuals resulted in a committee open to new ideas, innovative design concepts and an eagerness to experiment with the concept of a Sporting Hall of Fame. Like many universities Macquarie has strong international connections through global academic and professional exchange. Committee participants were able to incorporate this international perspective to refine the concept of developing a new innovative museum.

Institutional identity is more commonly construed with art museums and art collections. Yet sport, also an integral and unifying conceptual framework of the human condition is rarely linked to the values and aspirations of a higher education institution. The development of the Macquarie University Sporting Hall of Fame Museum can be construed as an innovative new way of building higher education identity through museum work in an increasingly competitive knowledge-based industry.

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¹¹ This was a primary motivation for the formation of Universeum, a network of European university museums dedicated to the preservation academic heritage and the promotion of European academic traditions.

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